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FM AMEMBASSY WARSAW
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7032
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RHMFIIT/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC
RHMFISS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 WARSAW 001093

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y - ADDED INFO ADDRESSEES

SIPDIS

EUR FOR A/S FRIED, EUR/CE FOR PIERANGELO

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/12/2018

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [PL](#)

SUBJECT: THE END OF A SUCCESSFUL IRAQ MISSION: EVALUATING
THE POLISH DEPLOYMENT

REF: A. IRR 6 878 0113 08

[1](#)B. STATE 96122

[1](#)C. PITRE-SAINZ E-MAIL 08/28/08

[1](#)D. HILLAS-SAINZ E-MAIL 08/28/08

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Classified By: DCM Quanrud. Reason 1.4 (D)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY. On October 15, Poland will bring to a close her five-year mission in Iraq. On balance, the Polish military presence in Iraq must be seen as a success. The deployment dates from the earliest days of the coalition in 2003; it survived two changes in government in Warsaw; and the decision to withdraw after the 2007 elections was coordinated with U.S. and Iraqi forces over the course of a full year. Poland leaves behind a stable province in Qadisiyah that is now secured by Polish-trained Iraqi soldiers. The Poles see their Iraq effort as an invaluable learning experience, one which will serve them (and us) well in other expeditionary missions. Despite these positives, we have often allowed the Polish mission to be overshadowed by our dialogue with the Poles regarding economic contracts and financial support. This is shortsighted, as economic factors were never determinative: Poland came in with us in a much-needed show of solidarity and withdrew (half a decade later) only when the public could no longer accept casualties. The contracts and the plea for military assistance were mostly about domestic political cover. Ref B rightly reminds us of the need to recognize Polish contributions and Polish achievements. This, along with continued material assistance, will help build public support for the deployment in Afghanistan and subsequent joint missions. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (C) Poland will hand over its military responsibilities to the coalition on October 1, and withdraw its last soldiers by the middle of the month. This will conclude its longest expeditionary activity since the Second World War. The Poles were among the first to deploy in 2003, and at its peak, the contingent numbered 2,500 troops. Some 15,000 Poles rotated through Iraq. Poland joined the fight to show solidarity with a key ally, the U.S., whom they consider the cornerstone of NATO's Article V commitment to defend Central Europe.

[1](#)3. (C) Poland leaves behind a stable province in Qadisiyah. Although only two Polish soldiers died during the most critical stages of the Surge, the Polish contingent from June to November 2007 conducted 25 operations outside the wire, involving 1,012 day and night patrols, 374 escorts, and 392 mobile control points. As a result, according to Polish assessments, insurgent activity by Jaish Al Mahdi and other militias was reduced, and freedom of movement on critical

routes in the province was restored (Ref A). The Polish commander, General Buk, established promotions and extra pay for soldiers who patrolled outside of their base. After the October 2007 elections, the GOP decided to withdraw its forces within a year, and the Polish contingent hunkered down in its base camp. But by then it was the view of Polish officers in the field that their mission had been completed successfully. Indeed, the July 2008 handover to Iraqi authorities in Qadisiyah was the result of an improved security climate and successful Polish training of border guards and the Iraqi 8th Army.

14. (C) Polish officials continue to have an overall positive assessment of their experience in Iraq, particularly within the military. Defense Minister Klich cites invaluable experience working with international partners. One official from the National Security Advisor's office reported that with regard to changing the mentality of the military and developing operational procedures and English language skills, Iraq has been "better than NATO -- a unique chance" for the Polish Army. Unlike some former partners who withdrew from Iraq and then attacked the U.S. position, a series of Polish governments have supported U.S. policy throughout. Even now, former President Kwasniewski says in speeches and op eds that the decision to go to Iraq was the right one.

15. (C) Mutual frustration over operational conduct of the war sometimes led to recrimination between U.S. and Polish defense officials. At times the Poles have been portrayed as whiners. However, such a view minimizes the contributions Poland made at a difficult time, and ignores that our partner is still undergoing a post-Warsaw-Pact evolutionary process. Poland provided steadfast political and military support when international opinion was overwhelmingly against the Iraq war. The Polish troops, along with other Coalition partners, also had to overcome Coalition intelligence and strategic errors during the build-up and early days of the conflict. The Polish side believes that it is the aggrieved party in bilateral

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interactions over Iraq: Foreign Minister Sikorski, for example, is adamant that Poland received U.S. oral assurances that it would get economic contracts in Iraq. He has told U.S. officials privately that those assurances were violated when U.S. officials wrote letters to steer contracts to others, and away from the Poles.

16. (C) Increasing Polish conditions and demands fed this atmosphere of recrimination, leading to a perception that the Poles were too "contractual." However, Polish participation in the war was never about military assistance or economic contracts -- as former Deputy Foreign Minister Witold Waszczykowski told the DCM recently, the Polish Government was intent on enhancing the Alliance with the U.S., as part of the Poles' perennial effort to cement stronger security assurances. In his view, the idea that Poland might play a large role in Iraq's reconstruction was just a feeble effort by the GoP to convince Poles that they had a direct interest in the country they were defending.

17. (C) Far from being too insistent on contracts or higher military funding, most Poles would say their original sin was being not contractual enough. Poles saw other U.S. partners receive substantial economic assistance (Turkey) or U.S. bases (Romania), and even non-partners won contracts in Iraq (France). During Missile Defense talks, Sikorski asked for more explicit, written guarantees because of his sense that Iraq-related oral assurances had not been fulfilled. Despite the bruised feelings, disappointment over military assistance and Iraq contracts -- for which Polish firms were admittedly weak bidders -- was not the reason for withdrawing from Iraq. Prime Minister Tusk made the decision to withdraw because of public opinion against the war and a desire to avoid further casualties. But unlike other partners, Poland spent a year coordinating its withdrawal with Iraqi and Coalition

partners, with much of the equipment moving directly to the Afghan theater.

¶8. (C) A shared U.S.-Polish understanding and greater U.S. appreciation of Poland's imperfect but nonetheless essential contribution to the Iraq mission would serve both Allies well. We need to apply lessons learned from Iraq to Afghanistan, where appropriate logistical and intelligence support can build on Poland's record as one of our most expeditionary partners.

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